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PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT

We have consulted closely with the Congress during the past week regarding the serious deterioration in security conditions in the Middle East/Persian Gulf region and the growing threat to our friends there from Soviet and other pressures. We have benefited from the Congressional views expressed and plan to continue to work closely with the Congress on steps to protect our interests in that vital region. The first step is to help our friends defend themselves and to rebuild their confidence in our reliability.

The Administration will shortly give notification to Congress of our intention to sell military equipment to Saudi Arabia. We propose to sell to the Saudis conformal fuel tanks and AIM-9L air-to-air missiles which will augment the defensive role of their F-15 aircraft. We have agreed to sell to Saudi Arabia aerial surveillance aircraft, subject to further determination of their specific requirements. We have agreed to be responsive on providing a refueling capability. We will also conduct a technical study with the Saudis to determine their air-to-ground requirements for defending against the threat of invasion.

We, of course, are aware of the assurances the previous Administration gave to the Congress in 1978 regarding these items. The critical fact today is that circumstances in the region have changed dramatically. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the turmoil of the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq war and the Soviet presence in South Yemen and Ethiopia underscore the instability in the region and the dangers of Soviet penetration and exploitation.

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These proposals for military sales are a sign of our determination that the United States will move decisively and quickly to protect its interests, and those of its friends and allies, when they are threatened.